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SUBJECT: LEBANON: JUMBLATT AND S/P GORDON: EMPOWERING
MODERATE VOICES, WINNING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. BEIRUT 750 B. BEIRUT 713 C. BEIRUT 733

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a discussion on how the U.S. can support a sovereign, independent, and stable Lebanon, Policy Planning Director David Gordon and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt agreed that empowering moderates and building a regional network of alternative voices were important long-term strategies. In the medium-term, the U.S. could work with the GOL to establish it as a government that serves all confessions, including the Shia community. Short-term goals include peeling away Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun's Christian supporters, focusing on March 14 winning the 2009 parliamentary elections, bolstering President Michel Sleiman, and providing military assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

2. (C) Jumblatt, noting he does not covet a cabinet position for himself, spoke of the intense Maronite competition for cabinet seats, which he believes could mean Justice Minister Charles Rizk, a Maronite, will not be re-appointed. Jumblatt is working out an arrangement with the opposition whereby he would appoint his Druze rival Talal Arslan as a minister without a portfolio, and the opposition in turn would allow Jumblatt to appoint independent Shia Ibrahim Shamseddine as a minister. End summary.

3. (C) In a June 3 visit to Lebanon, Policy Planning Director David Gordon, Todd Deatherage, and Whitley Wolman of S/P, accompanied by the Charge, Special Assistant, and PolOff, met with Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt at his home in Clemenceau.

REGIONAL NETWORK OF
ALTERNATIVE VOICES

4. (C) Gordon stressed the importance of empowering alternative, moderate voices as a long-term strategy, currently being pursued by the U.S. in Iraq, which could be applied regionally to include Lebanon. Jumblatt was receptive to the idea, naming Abdul Aziz Hakim, a prominent Iraqi theologian and politician with ties to Iran who has publicly denounced "velayat-e-fagih" (Persian concept of an

Islamic supremacy), as a possible regional partner in developing an independent Shia regional network. (Note: Embassy Beirut has been exploring this very idea with several figures, including independent Shia Lokman Slim and Jumblatt's PSP Vice-President Duraïd Yaghi, Ref A. End note)

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT
SERVES ALL CONFESSIONS

¶15. (C) Another goal is to promote the national government as a government that serves all confessions, and to persuade the Shia in particular to view the government as their government too, Gordon proposed. He said this idea was discussed in Washington when he met with independent Shia, and noted that he would soon send someone from S/P to explore this concept further in conjunction with Embassy Beirut.

PEEL AWAY AOUN'S SUPPORT
THROUGH EMPOWERING SLEIMAN

¶16. (C) Gordon also spoke of the challenge of peeling away Hizballah-allied Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun's Christian constituency. He remarked that improved March 14 messaging focused on winning the spring 2009 parliamentary elections was one way to draw away Aoun's supporters. Jumblatt agreed that winning the elections was March 14's primary objective.

¶17. (C) Jumblatt proposed that President Sleiman could play a key role in attracting Christian voters. Noting that S/P would be working to ensure continuity in U.S. policy into the next administration, Gordon emphasized to Jumblatt the importance of a visit by Sleiman to the White House.

¶18. (C) Inquiring whether the U.S. has influence with the Armenian Tashnaq party, Jumblatt warned that Iran is increasingly involved with Armenia and potentially with Tashnaq. He noted that courting the Tashnaq is an opportunity for March 14, especially after Doha led to a districting agreement in its favor (Ref C). (Note: Charge and Poloff will next be meeting with Tashnaq leaders on June 6. End Note)

STRENGTHENING THE LAF

¶19. (C) Jumblatt stressed that U.S. support to the Lebanese Armed Forces is critical. The Charge informed Jumblatt of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman's successful May 31 visit, during which he reinforced the U.S.'s commitment to provide military training and equipment. Jumblatt also suggested exploring how to change Syrian President Bashar Asad's behavior, adding that he was disappointed to hear that the UN Security Council approved a six-month extension to UNIIIC, believing an extension sends the message to Syria that there is no case to try suspects in former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination.

SPECULATION ON
CABINET FORMATION

¶10. (C) Noting that he is not seeking a ministerial position for himself, Jumblatt said he sees heavy competition among the Maronite March 14 leaders for ministerial positions. Jumblatt confirmed that Elias Murr will stay on as Defense Minister as one of the President's appointments, and Sleiman will also choose the Minister of Interior, perhaps former Defense Attache in Washington retired BG Fares Soufia. (Note: Other sources close to Sleiman have told us recently that he will not appoint individuals with military backgrounds. End note.)

¶11. (C) Jumblatt believes that March 14 will be selecting ministers for the Finance, Justice, and Telecommunications Ministries, but that current Justice Minister Charles Rizk

and Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamadeh are unlikely to stay on. Jumblatt cited Maronite competition as to why it is "impossible" for Rizk, a Maronite, to remain in his Ministry, adding that perhaps the Justice Ministry would be filled by a Sunni.

¶12. (C) He thought former President and Kataeb (Phalange) leader Amine Gemayel was "entitled" to a ministry because his assassinated son Pierre Gemayel was Minister of Industry at the time of his murder. According to Jumblatt, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea should not expect an appointment. He hopes incumbent Cultural Affairs Minister Tareq Mitri will be re-appointed.

¶13. (C) Jumblatt also told us that for the three Druze seats, he may choose to appoint rival Druze leader Talal Arslan as a minister but with no portfolio, and the opposition would then allow Jumblatt to appoint independent Shia Ibrahim Shamseddine as a minister.

¶14. (C) The Labor Ministry will likely be retained for a Shia minister, Jumblatt speculated, because of social security issues. Jumblatt does not believe Tripoli MP Mosbah Ahdab is a likely ministerial candidate, explaining that Public Works and Transportation Minister Mohammed Safadi "seems to be the preferred candidate" among the Tripoli Sunni politicians.

"CLIMATE OF NONCONFIDENCE"
IN THE MOUNTAINS

¶15. (C) Reflecting on how his Druze supporters are faring in the Chouf in the aftermath of the May clashes with Hizballah, Jumblatt said they are afraid and living in a "climate of nonconfidence." He noted that Shia militias are still positioned throughout the Chouf, and the Druze and Shia are "watching each other." The LAF is present, he conceded, but inactive. He reported that later in the day he will meet with Amal (Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri's opposition Shia party) members to prepare a for a tour in Keyfoun and Bisour aimed at reducing tensions. Jumblatt assessed that Amal is "less-organized and slowly losing influence."

¶16. (U) S/P Director Gordon did not have an opportunity to clear this message before departing Beirut.

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